

# Gardening4Health

## Newsletter Spring 2026

A change in Editorship as Dr Susan Taheri, G4H Trustee, NHS GP and founder of Growing Well Garden in Devon takes over the newsletter for this edition.

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### Social Prescribing Day

The annual global event highlighting the power of community-based support - such as local groups, art classes, and volunteering - in improving physical and mental wellbeing, took place on 26 March.

This felt like a timely opportunity to share my own experience of setting up a Green Social Prescribing project, [Growing Well Garden](#) at my rural Devon GP practice back at the start of 2022.



Since 2019, when the NHS published its Long Term Health Plan, groups of GP practices organised as Networks (PCNs) have been able to employ a number of additional roles to support a range of both clinical and non clinical work. As a result of this, social prescribing link workers have become largely embedded across many regions of England supporting 'What Matters to You Most?' conversations with the patients who are referred to them. Other schemes have supported similar changes in Scotland and Wales.

The success of our project to date has largely been due to the fact that 18 months in, we were able to employ a 'Garden Link Worker' using centrally allocated NHS funding for social prescribing. This meant that we had a permanent – albeit part-time – presence in the garden to support our activities.

As of January this year, Growing Well Garden's new "link worker" is Shelley O'Berg, a highly experienced gardener who has also most recently worked in an NHS therapy setting in the North of England, so the fit really couldn't be better. Making the transition from a secondary (hospital-based) service as one member of a more structured team, to a primary (GP) care setting has been something of a change. Shelley is already supporting a range of activities in the garden based around small groups and working alongside volunteers





who help keep the garden running, and will soon also be offering one-to-one sessions to individuals referred by the clinical team.

We have tried not to be too narrow in the description of our project but having started out as a supportive “social gardening” project, our hope is that we can make a gradual shift in what we do towards more formal Therapeutic Horticulture. As an enormous organisation, the NHS can be clunky to navigate (at best!) and trying something new and different is not without challenges and frustrations even on our very small scale. At the same time, starting our project – literally – at grassroots has created enormous

opportunities, not least to bring our patient with us from the start and be guided by the needs we identify and feedback we receive.

At a recent event run by Shelley, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and other members of the local community rehabilitation team had the chance to learn about Therapeutic Horticulture and take part in a session themselves to better understand what Growing Well Garden might be able to offer their patients.

My hope remains that our experience might provide the opportunity for other schemes to do something similar in terms of securing a funded role within their own projects and by doing so improve access to therapeutic horticulture for more people.

**Up on the roof - The new garden at the Critical Care Unit at King’s College Hospital. Dr Richard Claxton, Founder of G4H and CEO of The National Garden Scheme, writes:**

A few weeks ago I had the privilege of attending the official opening of the Rooftop Garden at King’s College Hospital’s Critical Care Unit—the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

Sitting in the shadow of the helipad with panoramic views across South London and Ruskin Park, this extraordinary space allows some of the hospital’s most unwell patients to be brought up to the roof at any one time. Thanks to an invisible web of life-support connectivity beneath the decking, their intensive care



continues seamlessly while they are immersed in fresh air, natural light, and clear skies.

The garden is a sensory masterpiece, specifically designed to counter the disorientation and intense stress of a clinical environment.

Tactile & Aromatic planting is positioned at bed height, featuring rosemary, thyme, Stachys byzantina, and fragrant star jasmine. Clear glass balustrades allow patients to look directly down into the green tree canopy of the park below.

The groundbreaking design was led by the late, legendary Professor Nigel Dunnett alongside Sarah Price. Tragically, Nigel passed away just weeks before the opening, but this will surely stand as one of his most influential and compassionate legacies.

The brainchild of Consultant Dr. Tom Best, this 10-year project isn't just about beauty—the clinical team will be researching the garden's measurable impact on patient recovery, tracking markers like heart rate, delirium, Vitamin D levels, as well as recovery rates and reductions in admission lengths.

The National Garden Scheme is incredibly proud to have part-funded this vital, innovative space through our Gardens and Health grants scheme, alongside the phenomenal fundraising efforts of the King's College Hospital Charity. Read the full story on our website now.

[National Garden Scheme](#)

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### **A reminder about the G4H Toolkit!**

The recently re-launched Gardening4Health website features a Toolkit designed to help groups and individuals looking to develop Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH) garden projects. It provides practical, non-prescriptive advice to help health providers, community organizations, and charities share knowledge and avoid common mistakes when building therapy gardens from scratch. We hope that it will prove to be an invaluable resource which will also save a lot of time by having all the essential information needed in one place.

You can access the [Toolkit](#) here.





## Trellis annual Conference review - Anna Baker Cresswell

I crossed the Forth Road Bridge on Friday 13th March from my home in Northumberland and headed to Perthshire for Trellis's annual Conference held again at The Bield, Blackruthven near Perth.

The Bield, formerly a country house with its own walled garden, is now a Christian retreat and conference centre where again Fiona Thackeray, Trellis's tireless CEO and her Team had arranged another terrific day of speakers, workshops and networking accompanied by lots of cake!

Every year the workshop programme raises the bar and the choice of which ones to attend gets harder.

As well as practical sessions including seed sowing, lawn scarification and mulching by Brian Cunningham, Scone Palace Head Gardener (aka the Ginger Gairdner), there were presentations by Debbie Carroll about gardening and dementia and by Suzanne Fox, Founder of The Yellow Tulip Project in the USA, which creates Hope Gardens to smash the stigma of youth mental health. Tours of The Bield's glorious walled garden with Head Gardener Pamela Grossi and the nearby Southton Smallholding gave plentiful networking opportunities for the enthusiastic attendees from all over Scotland and beyond.

Fiona's welcome address entitled TH – a pivotal moment, couldn't have been more apposite as she outlined the progress Therapeutic Horticulture has made and everyone present echoed her desire to #makeTHmainstream.

I must personally record my thanks to Fiona and admiration for her persistence with the UK Association of Therapeutic Horticulture (UKASTH) which, with the help of Ben Thomas, CEO of THRIVE will finally get over the line later this year when the Professional Competencies start to be piloted – it has been a long old road!

In Trellis's 20th anniversary year the City of Edinburgh's Floral Clock will celebrate this remarkable charity in Princes Street Gardens. The Floral Clock was first created in 1903 and is the oldest floral clock of its kind in the world.

Fiona said *"It is such an honour for Trellis to be chosen for this year's Floral Clock, in what is a special year in our charity's short history. In just 20 years Trellis has taken an unknown*



**Fiona Thackeray, CEO Trellis (left) with Debbie Carroll**



*therapeutic intervention into the heart of communities and has helped the profession and the people it supports to flourish as a result.*

*"I hope that people visiting the floral clock will take a moment to recognise not only the great skill involved in creating such a display but also the profound and positive impact that plants and nature can have on their wellbeing."*

Jim Jermyn, Trellis Board Member closed the day with a reminder about World Therapeutic Horticulture Day on 18th May [World Therapeutic Horticulture Day 2026 | Trellis](#) and somehow, Conference was over for another year.

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**Dr Richard Claxton, Founder of G4H and CEO of The National Scheme, writes about his recent visit to the newest of the [Horatio's Gardens](#) in Sheffield.**

The rebirth of 2023's Best in Show Garden at Chelsea with its clever design and beautiful planting won many hearts back then - and both features have transplanted beautifully to its forever home here at the NHS Spinal Unit in the Northern General Hospital.



This was a favourite of mine back then, funded by [Project Giving Back](#), and designed by [Harris Bugg Studio](#). It was distinctive for its Dry-stone cairns - familiar from the nearby Peak District, the water feature sculpted from old Sheffield steel cutlery moulds, and the domed garden pod clad in silvered shingles.

But seeing it relocated here, the sense of space and freedom is markedly different. The walkways are as smooth and flat as I remember, but so much broader, with delightful curves that lead around a cabin to a broad parasol-shaded piazza - accessibility to the max. The sense of space and freedom continues in the pod, in the cabin and in the greenhouse - all ideal for enabling

anyone in a wheelchair or a bed, to see, touch and connect with the natural world - whatever the weather.

And the planting is fabulous - be it in the raised riveted beds or the mounded borders of gorgeous perennials, bulbs, specimen trees and grasses. Much of the foliage and many of the flowers are at the perfect height if you're seated, and all together they carry such a sensory impact - of sight, sound, touch and smell.

Talking to some of the patients - both residents and outpatients returning for clinics, brought

home the huge impact this space is having on them and their recovery. [Ruth Chivers](#), the Head Gardener here, is heavily involved in their care and rehabilitation, and it was inspirational to see how much she loves and cares for this space too.

The National Garden Scheme is the largest single donor for Horatio's Garden, and has committed to long term funding for all 11 of the gardens – of which the new Sheffield garden is number eight - it is building nationwide.

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**Rebecca Fincham, Director of Programmes at The Serge Hill Project reports on a the one-day symposium held at the Serge Hill project earlier this year: *Safe Green Space: the Landscape of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture***

Back on 19 March, we were thrilled to host a one-day symposium at [The Serge Hill Project](#) for Gardening, Creativity and Health in collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Horticulture's STH Group, which brought together leading names to collectively map the future of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture.

Held in our eco-barn, The Apple House, surrounded by the Plant Library, the day was packed with impassioned speakers including Ben Thomas (Thrive), Molly Aldham (NASP), Dr Honey Smith (Greener Practice), Richard Claxton (National Garden Scheme), Sue Stuart-Smith (Serge Hill Project), Sarah Galvin (RHS) to name a few, with an audience full of practitioners and charities from across the sector, also contributing to the conversation.

And so through multiple study-backed perspectives, the state of the sector and its future was mapped, taking in the view from primary care, the practitioners' perspective, the role of community gardens as well as finding the doors to unlock corporate funding. The message was clear: social therapeutic horticulture is not a luxury but a right. It works. We know it works, but until there is equitable access to its services, until the industry is recognised, the use of it will not meet the need.

From the NHS to NGS, from the cancer patients we garden with here to veterans supported by the Defence Gardens Scheme, the day revealed the way all corners of STH practice transect and cross with each other; it highlighted the fringes where they all meet and the commonalities between our practices, passions and problems we face. So many people working out in garden, healthcare and community settings, doing excellent things, changing lives in isolation. The day in itself was a small move towards



addressing this need for connectivity. And it was brilliant to hear Ben Thomas, CEO of Thrive share details of the pilot of the UK Association for Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (ASTH), co-founded with Trellis that will set the national standard for STH and bring together the various threads of STH and unite them with a common language.

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Other upcoming events at The Serge Hill Project include:

Gardens That Can Save The World with Lottie Delamain, Kali Hamerton-Stove and Sue Stuart-Smith [here](#)

Introduction to Nature Writing With Nic Wilson and Sue Stuart-Smith [here](#)

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### **The National Garden Scheme**

If you have a project that needs funds – it's worth thinking about applying for one from The National Garden Scheme

#### **Gardens and health beneficiaries**

The charities funded as part of the National Garden Scheme's Gardens and Health programme create gardens with health benefits and promote gardens and gardening as therapy. The current beneficiaries are: Maggie's, Horatio's Garden, The Army Benevolent Fund, and The Country Trust.



Gardens and Health grants applications are reviewed annually in September. An application must be for a garden with a clear health and/or wellbeing purpose, or from a charity to develop a programme of gardening therapy. Eligibility must be established before an application can be made; all enquiries should be sent by email to the Chief Executive ([richard@ngs.org.uk](mailto:richard@ngs.org.uk)).

#### **Community garden grants**

The National Garden Scheme also funds community garden projects that help support regeneration, social cohesion and the health and wellbeing of communities. Grants are for a maximum of £5,000 and are awarded through an application process that is open annually for a set period of weeks in October and November.

Application process for Community Garden Grants: For details click [here](#)